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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 GUANGZHOU 000589

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SUBJECT: Townspeople Riot Over Family Planning Abuses in Guangxi

REF: Beijing 2855

(U) Classified by Acting Economic/Political Section Chief Drake Weisert for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Thousands of people in Bobai County, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, set fire to government buildings and vehicles and attacked family planning officials in response to alleged abuses, according to Hong Kong and foreign media. Some reports state that five people died in the clashes, including three family planning officials, though Bobai officials have denied that any deaths occurred. Local officials, under pressure from their superiors, allegedly used forced abortions, forced sterilizations, and heavy fines to enforce family planning quotas. This unrest follows an April 28 report by National Public Radio that officials in a different Guangxi county used forced abortions to meet birth planning targets. Congenoff's attempted calls to many Guangxi officials and Guangdong newspapers went unanswered. Offices that did answer their phones either denied knowledge of the incident or refused to comment. END SUMMARY.

(U) Protesters Attack Government Offices

¶2. (U) Thousands of people in seven or eight of the 32 townships under the jurisdiction of Bobai County have repeatedly clashed with government officials and police since the beginning of May, according to Hong Kong media reports (Note: the Mainland media has not reported on the story. End Note). The largest of the protests took place on the morning of May 19 in Shabei township, when thousands of people reportedly attacked family planning officials, set fire to government offices and vehicles, and smashed government computers and equipment. Approximately 1,000 armed police were called to the scene to maintain order, arresting more than 30 people.

¶3. (U) Hong Kong media reports state that five people died in the clashes, including three family planning officials, though Bobai officials denied any fatalities. Dozens were reportedly injured. The Bobai government has brought in additional police from a neighboring city to guard against future protests. In addition, the government formed a task force composed of officials from the Public Security Bureau, Family Planning Bureau, Procuratorate, and the Courts, according to press reports.

¶4. (C) Beijing-based independent author Wang Lixiong (strictly protect) told Embassy Poloff on May 21 that activists and internet writers are well aware of the reports of the riots in Guangxi despite the absence of reporting in Mainland media. He said that he and other Chinese writers had discussed the incident on the internet,

but did not have confirmation that local people or officials were killed in the incident. Wang remarked that the incident in Guangxi is not unusual, as currently there are major riots occurring regularly all over China. As in this case, however, these incidents are localized and erupt in connection with a specific local grievance. The Bobai incident will not spread to other jurisdictions or become a rallying point for outside activists, he predicted.

¶ 15. (C) Congenoff's attempted calls to many Guangxi officials on May 22 went unanswered, as were calls to Guangzhou and Guangdong newspapers (work phones and cell phones both went unanswered). An unidentified woman at the Foreign Affairs Office in Yulin City (which has jurisdiction over Bobai County) denied knowledge of the incident. A woman at the Bobai County General Affairs Office told Congenoff she could not answer our questions, and then hung up. A Guangzhou-based academic contact told Congenoff that he had heard of the incident, but did not know any details. The Associated Press reported on May 21 that a woman who answered the phone Monday at the Shabei township government said she had no comment and refused to give her name.

(U) Abuses Stem From Pressure on Quotas

¶ 16. (U) After Bobai failed to meet its birth planning quota in 2006, local family planning officials and the County's party secretary were under pressure to strengthen enforcement, according to Hong Kong media. According to a New York-based dissident website, Guangxi Party Secretary Liu Qibao and Vice Chairman Lu Bing both attended a Guangxi Population and Family Planning Work Conference in February

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2007, during which Bobai County was given a warning for failure to meet family planning targets.

¶ 17. (U) Measures released in early 2007 reportedly imposed new fines, ranging from RMB 10,000-70,000 (USD 1,300-9,000), on anyone violating family planning measures - regardless of whether they had paid fines in the past. The measures give family planning officials the authority to seize property, including household appliances, farm tools, and livestock of those who cannot pay the fines. The Bobai government also reportedly required women, regardless of their age or marital status, to be sterilized or receive abortions in order to meet quotas. The South China Morning Post reported that an article on a Chinese government website said the authorities had carried out "population control measures" on 252 people since March.

(U) Similar Abuses Reported Elsewhere in Guangxi

¶ 18. (U) An April 28 National Public Radio report described a surge of forced abortions by family planning officials in Baise City in northwest Guangxi. A subsequent search of Mainland press reports revealed that Baise family planning officials were also under pressure for failing to meet 2006 birth planning targets. According to the reports, the vice mayor of Baise instituted a "single-strike veto system," in which government officials would not be promoted if the areas under their jurisdiction surpassed annual birth control targets.

(SBU) Central Government Shocked

¶ 19. (SBU) The Bobai incident has shocked Chinese central government officials, according to a Canada-based Chinese language news website. An unnamed deputy director general from the National Family Planning Commission, Guangxi Deputy Party Secretary Guo Shengkun, and Vice Chairman Liu Xinwen have reportedly been dispatched to Bobai to

investigate the incident and prevent a recurrence of rioting.

(U) Comment

¶10. (C) In both the Bobai and Baise cases, local officials in areas that failed to meet family planning targets were under pressure meet future targets. Unless provincial officials make it clear that heavy-handed - and illegal - measures such as forced abortions will not be tolerated, future clashes may occur. Nonetheless, there is no indication that the rioting has spread beyond Guangxi, and it appears unlikely that the incidents in Bobai will spark a unified national protest movement.

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